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A

S E R M O N

PREACH'D AT THE

S E P A R A T I O N

OF THE

Reverend Mr. NICHOLAS PHENE,

TO THE

Pastoral-Office, in the Church of CHRIST,

at HERTFORD, NOVEMBER 15, 1769.

By THOMAS TOWLE, B.D.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY DISCOURSE,

By JOHN ANGUS.

*Publiſh'd at the request of the Church and Congregation
at Hertford, and, of the Ministers and Messengers
of other Churches, then present.*

L O N D O N:

Printed for G. PEARCH, No. 12, in Cheapſide. 1769.

[Price ONE SHILLING.]



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IT is not usual, to receive A CONFESSION OF FAITH IN FORM, or deliver that exhortation, which is commonly call'd A CHARGE, when the minister settled has been a pastor; let this custom, therefore, be consider'd, as the only reason, why neither the one, nor the other, appears in the following performance.

THE NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTORY
DISCOURSE,
By JOHN ANGUS.

WE are now, Brethren, assembled on a very important occasion, even that, of setting apart a worthy Brother, to the pastoral office, in this Church of Christ; and, as I have been requested to introduce the work of the day, permit me, with that view, to bespeak your serious and candid attention; to a few general and leading thoughts, which will not, I hope, be found wholly unsuitable, to the present solemnity: after suggesting which, I will proceed, to propose the questions, which it is usual to ask, on such occasions.

The greatest, and, to us, the most interesting, of all the works of God, is that, of redemption; a work, which is evidently "the Lord's doing, "and, marvellous in our eyes,"* exhibiting so bright and illustrious a display of the divine perfections, in full and glorious harmony, as is no

* Psal. cxviii. 22.

where else to be met with. And, as it is a work, which, in a peculiar manner, invites and demands our attention, so, according to the regard which we pay to it, will be our character, and state for ever; either, highly becoming, and inconceivably happy, or horridly base, and inexpressibly wretched.

Now, in this, which is the noblest of all the divine works, the three sacred persons of the adorable Godhead, have a distinct, necessary, and important concern; accordingly, the different characters, which they sustain, and, the various parts, which they act herein, it becomes us, to take special notice of, and, contemplate, with wonder and praise.

The first parents of the human race, were created "in the image, and after the likeness of God,†" their maker; and, how vast an honour and felicity was this! But, alas! by their base and aggravated apostacy from him, to whom they stood indebted for their all, and, whom they were under the strongest obligations, perfectly to love, and, perpetually to obey, they forfeited, and, lost this their original dignity, and happiness; so sinking themselves, and, together with themselves, their whole posterity, into awful depths of guilt, pollution, and misery; out of which, nothing but divine grace, and almighty power, could ever have possibly recover'd them.

This horrid and ruinous apostacy of man, God, the Father, from all eternity, foresaw; and, though, in the prospect of it, he might justly have determin'd, to reject the whole human race, and, leave them to perish for ever in their sins, as he

† Gen. i. 26,

did "the angels, which kept not their first estate;†" yet, in the midst of deserved judgment, he remember'd, and exercis'd, undeserved and most astonishing mercy: for, in order to manifest and display the exceeding riches of his free and sovereign grace, he pitied mankind sinners, in this their low estate, and, made choice of a certain number of them, to be "vessels of mercy,§" whom he ordain'd to salvation, and, whose names he set down in his book of life.

That, these, the beloved and chosen of the Father, might be sav'd, in a way, consistent with his honour, and justice, and, the sacred rights of his immutable government, a proposal was made to God, the Son, that, he should become their covenant head, surety, and redeemer. This proposal, the son of God, "full of grace;||" and, the most perfect pattern of filial obedience, readily agreed to, and, in order to accomplish the grand and godlike design in view, "when "the fullness of time was come,*" he "was "made flesh,†" appear'd in our world, humbled himself in the most astonishing manner, and, by his perfect obedience, and, bloody sufferings, "obtain'd" complete and "eternal redemption.††"

That, the persons, for whom this redemption was purchas'd, might be actual partakers of it, God, the Spirit, as "the spirit of" all "grace|||" engag'd to apply it to them; and, this, which he undertook, he now, by his divine and efficacious operations, accomplishes, in all the chosen, whom, in their several successive generations, he quick-

† Jud. v. 6. § Rom. ix. 23. || John i. 14. * Gal. iv. 4.
† John i. 14. †† Heb. ix. 12. ||| Heb. x. 29.

ens, enlightens, unites to Christ, renews and sanctifies, and trains up in a meetness for eternal glory.

But, the holy spirit, in thus applying the redemption purchas'd by Christ, is pleas'd, as the God of order, to work by fuitable external means and institutions; and the principal mean, which he makes use of, to this end, is the gospel ministry; a mean, which, though weak in itself, is render'd mighty, through him, for the conversion of sinners, and edification of saints.

The persons, employ'd in this ministry, are, not the angels of heaven, who doubtless would have esteem'd it, a great honour, and happiness, to have been engag'd in it, but, men here upon earth, creatures, of the same rank, nature, and passions, with ourselves; the divine wisdom seeing it meet, that, the "treasure" of the gospel, should be put, not into vessels of gold, but into "earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power, "might" more evidently appear to "be," not of the instruments, but "of God.*"

The gospel ministry was instituted, by the Lord Jesus himself, as the great head and king of his church. In the days of his flesh, he appointed twelve of his disciples to this office, and, invested them with power, and authority, to execute it; and, though while he continued with them, he confin'd their ministry, to "the lost "sheep of the house of Israel,†" yet, after his resurrection from the dead, he greatly enlarg'd their commission, and order'd them, "to "go and disciple all the nations," and, with a view, to intimate, that, their office, as preachers of the gospel, was to be a standing ordinance in his

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

† Matt. x. 6.

church, and, an office, in which they were to have successors, in all future ages, he added, " lo! I am with you, alway, even unto the end of the world. † " A promise this, how instructive, and encouraging! It directs the ministers of Jesus, to look up to, and depend upon him, for assistance, and success, and, assures them, that, he will, at all times, stand by them, and aid them, in their sacred, and painful labours. Confiding in so gracious a promise, whom, or what, need we fear? and, with what chearful diligence should we apply ourselves to the duties of our office, yea, persevere in the faithful discharge of them, amidst all discouragements from earth or hell?

The gospel ministry, which the Lord Jesus thus instituted, during his abode on earth, on his ascension to heaven, he obtain'd from his father, the ratification of, together with a large variety of spiritual gifts, to fit, and qualify his servants for it: for, " when he ascended up on high, " as he led captivity, captive, so he receiv'd, and " gave gifts unto men: and, he gave some, " apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors, and teachers; for " the perfecting of the saints, for the work of " the ministry, for the edifying of the body of " Christ: till we all come, in the unity of the " faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God, " unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the " stature, of the fulness of Christ. || "

The first complete Christian church, was the church of Jerusalem; a church, which the apostles planted, and form'd, after the down-pouring of the spirit, on the glorious and ever-memorable day of Pentecost: and, in this church, during their

† Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

|| Ephes. iv. 8, &c.

abode

abode at Jerusalem, they were joint pastors or elders. But, the extraordinary commission, which they had receiv'd, as apostles and evangelists, "to go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,*" forbad their long, and stated continuance, in that church, and, therefore, after they had set apart other elders or pastors, to succeed them there,† they went abroad into all the nations, proclaiming, wherever they came, the glad tidings of the gospel of peace.

When their labours, were in any place, crown'd with success, they form'd their converts into churches, "and ordain'd them elders,‡" to whose care and inspection in the Lord, they committed them: and this, which the apostles themselves did, they empower'd, and directed others, who were only evangelists, to do likewise. Thus, the Apostle Paul says, to his beloved Timothy, "The things, which thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.¶" And, to Titus he writes thus, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that, thou shouldest set in order, the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city; as I had appointed thee,‡‡" And that, not only these evangelists, but, all the churches in every future age, might know, what sort of persons, they should set apart, to the office of elders or pastors, this apostle, in his epistles to Timothy, and Titus, particularly describes the essential character, and necessary qualifications of a Christian bishop§.

Now, from all this, how evident is it! that,

* Mar. xvi. 15. † See Acts xv. 23. ‡ Acts xiv. 23.
 ¶ 2 Tim. ii. 2. ‡‡ Tit. i. 5. § See 1 Tim. iii. 2, &c.
 and Tit. i. 6, &c.

the office of pastors, or elders, was design'd to be a standing office in the churches of Christ, and, such an office, it has, in fact, prov'd; for, from the apostolic age, to this very day, there has been a constant succession, of pastors or elders, kept up in the church, yea, and, their succession, will be maintain'd in it, till the Redeemer's second coming; for, he, the great head, and king of the church, lives for ever, "all power, in heaven, and, in earth, is committed unto him,†" and, having "built his church upon a rock" he declares, that "the gates of hell shall not" so far "prevail against it," as to put a final period to it's existence, in all the parts of the world, at the same time ||.

One generation of ministers, as well as of common professors, passeth away after another; "The fathers where are they? And, the prophets do they live for ever?*" No; the dispensers of the gospel, like to the priests under the law, are not "suffer'd to continue, by reason of death.†" But, blessed be God! and, adored be the grace of the ever-living Jesus! as one generation of his ministering servants is call'd off the stage, another is rais'd up, to succeed them, in their office, and carry on his work, in his churches; and thus, though "all flesh is as grass, and, all the glory of man, as the flower of the grass, the grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth away," yet "the word of the Lord endureth for ever, "that word, which by the gospel" ministry, "is preach'd unto us.§"

The church of Christ in this place, has been honour'd and bless'd with the successive ministers

† Matt. xxviii. 18. || Matt. xvi. 18. * Zech. i. 5.
 † Heb. vii. 23. § 1 Pet. i. 24, 25.

of an Haworth §, a Guyse, and a Saunders; men eminent in their day, for their piety, and soundness in the faith: their memory, is deservedly precious in this place; and, their "praise is in the gospel, throughout all the churches.||" The last of these, the late worthy pastor of this church, labour'd here, with much acceptance and success, for above forty years. By his pious disposition, and exemplary conduct, he was "a burning and "a shining light;*" A venerable man, of a good old puritanical stamp. "He fought a good fight, he finish'd his course, he kept the faith," and, has now receiv'd the promis'd "crown of righteousness.†" O! may a double portion of his serious and evangelical spirit rest on all of us who are left behind! and, so far as he was a follower of Christ, may we be followers of him!

But, the great loss, which the church here has sustain'd, by the removal of this his excellent servant, the Lord is now, I hope, making up to them, in the course of his providence. He is this day, providing them, with another pastor; a pastor, I trust, "according to his own heart;‡" one, who, we are assur'd, expect, and doubt not, will preach to them the same great and evangelical doctrines, which have formerly been dispens'd from this place, and maintain, and exercise, among them, the same church-order, and discipline, which has been kept up, and practis'd, by all their preceding pastors.

The great duty, and peculiar business of pastors, or elders, whom Christ has appointed to continue and labour in his churches, as pointed out in the

§ See Calamy's account of the ejected ministers. Vol. II. p. 360. || 2 Cor. viii. 18. * John v. 35. † 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8. ‡ Jer. iii. 15.

for scriptures, is briefly this : to lead the worship of his people, preach the word, administer the ordinances of baptism and the lords supper, be examples to the flock in all holy conversation, inspect their conduct, give them suitable reproof, and consolation, and assist them in all affairs of government and discipline. And when they are men of proper abilities and suitable furniture, have at heart, the redeemers glory, the interests of pure religion, and the good of precious souls, and attend, with fidelity, and diligence, to the discharge of the several duties of this office, they are very great blessings to the church, and ought as such to be highly priz'd and respected.

A Church of Christ, is a society of persons, who professing the faith of the gospel, acknowledging Jesus for their only head and sovereign, in matters of religion and conscience, and entertaining a good hope through grace of their interest in him, agree to walk together, in all his commandments and ordinances, and, make it their study, and endeavour, to behave, in a proper correspondency to their sacred profession, and solemn vows. And, every such religious society, acting under the authority, and agreeable to the laws of Christ, has an undeniable right, to chuse it's own officers, and, in particular, it's pastors and elders, and, transact within itself, it's own spiritual concerns, without being dependant on, or accountable to, any foreign jurisdiction, upon earth, whether civil or clerical.

But, as all particular Churches, are distinct parts and members of the same great and catholick body, of which Christ is the vital and governing head, they ought, as such, to hold communion one with another. And, as one instance, or branch, of this communion, when any particular Church is destitute of, and proceeds to the choice, and, publick settlement

element of a pastor, it is very becoming, in a Church, so circumstanc'd, to invite the pastors and messengers, of neighbouring churches, to be present on the solemn occasion; that, they may be witnesses of their faith and order, and join with and assist them, in the sacred duties then proper to be attended to.

You, the members of the church of Christ, in this place, judge this to be your duty, and, have accordingly invited, the pastors, and messengers, of several neighbouring churches, to meet together at this time, "to behold your faith and order," † in chusing, and this day setting apart, our Reverend Brother, to the pastoral office amongst you. And, now, that, the elders and messengers, of the churches, here assembled, on this occasion, may be able to form, a proper judgement of your faith, and order, in these solemn transactions, permit me, to request of you, the members of this church, to give me, by one of your number, some account of the steps, you have taken, in the choice and settlement, which you are this day, going to compleat, and be pleas'd at the same time to avow and recognize your call of the Reverend Mr. Phene, to the pastoral office among you, by lifting up your hands.

The Church's Account,

"Reverend Sir,

IT having pleas'd God to remove, by death, our late worthy Pastor, the Reverend Mr. John Saunders, of whose faithful labours amongst us we desire to entertain a most thankful remembrance; during the time of our destitute state, we convers'd

with each other, enquir'd of our friends, and pray'd to God for direction. While we were thus employ'd, the Reverend Mr. Phene, then of Gloucester, was mention'd to us, as moveable, and, as a minister of whom it might be proper for us to make tryal. Having receiv'd this information, we desir'd him to come over and preach amongst us, that, we might judge how far his labours might be acceptable to us.—He comply'd with our request; and, having repeatedly heard him, we, after conversing with each other, and, again seeking direction from above, gave him an unanimous and affectionate invitation to the pastoral office amongst us; the subscribers toward the support of the dissenting interest here, expressing their approbation of and concurrence with this our call. The Reverend Mr. Phene, after taking time to consider of it, declar'd his acceptance. In consequence of this, he remov'd to Hertford; by which we have enjoy'd an opportunity of observing his gifts, ministry, and conversation, to be so promising for acceptance, and usefulness, in this place, as that the church of Christ here have not only renew'd their invitation, and again receiv'd his acceptance, but, also admitted him a member amongst us; have fix'd this day for his settlement with us; and desir'd the assistance of the Pastors, and presence of the messengers of our sister churches, on this solemn occasion. We now, therefore, by holding up our hands, publickly renew our invitation of the Reverend Mr. Phene, to be our Pastor, and, earnestly request the prayers of the Reverend ministers, and all now present, that this settlement may be follow'd with a Divine Blessing."

Having heard, Reverend Sir, an account of the steps which this church has taken, in calling you

to the pastoral office in it, let me now request you, to favour me with a relation, of the light, in which the call appeared to your mind, and, of the motives which influenced you to comply with it: and, be further pleas'd, Sir, at the same time, to testify your publick acceptance of this call.

Mr. Phene's Account.

“ Reverend Sir,

IT may be necessary to inform you, that, in September 1768, I receiv'd an invitation from the church of Christ at Hertford, to preach to them, a few Lord's days; their late worthy pastor having been remov'd from them, by death. After communicating the affair to the church of Christ at Gloucester, then under my pastoral care, and weighing all circumstances, I found myself dispos'd to attend to their request, in order to discern the footsteps of Providence; especially, as my late dear partner in life was then in a threatenng state of health, and a change of air was declar'd to be the most probable means for her recovery.

Having come over, and preach'd here, three Lord's days in the following month, the church of Christ in this place, gave me an affectionate unanimous invitation, to the pastoral office. On my return from Hertford, I consulted with some of my brethren in the ministry at London, and, it was their joint and unanimous opinion, that, God, in his providence, evidently call'd me to Hertford.

When return'd to Gloucester, after seeking to God for direction, advising with friends,
viewing

viewing the particular circumstances of my family, with the pleasing prospect of more extensive usefulness, it appear'd to me, my indispensable duty, to attend this opening of Providence. Having inform'd the church at Hertford of my determination, on my removal from Gloucester, I requested the church there, to give me a dismission, to this church of Christ, and, they complied with my request; Accordingly, I remov'd hither, and enter'd on my publick ministry, in the month of January last. Ever since my residence here, "I have not shun'd to declare "the whole counsel of God*," according to the light given to me, and in that way which has appear'd to me, most calculated to advance the divine glory, promote the welfare of precious immortal souls, and, the general good of this interest. In matters of faith, I would "call no man "upon earth rabbi†," but, would form the whole plan of my religious sentiments, upon the word of God, saying, with a celebrated champion for liberty and protestantism, "The Bible, the Bible is the religion of Protestants‡." And, it is my desire, as being led by the Spirit, into all truth, "as it is in Jesus§," faithfully, and, without reserve, to communicate, what appears to me, by close reading, meditation, and prayer, to be the will of God, both with respect to faith, and practice. As instructed by "the Spirit of truth||," I am myself convinc'd, and have endeavour'd to teach others, that, the whole of our salvation, from it's foundation in the eternal counsels, to the laying the top stone in glory, arises from the rich

* Acts xx. 27.
 § Ephes. iv. 21.

† Matth. xxiii. 28,
 || John xvi. 13.

‡ Chillingworth.

free sovereign grace, and, everlasting love of God; "not of works least any man should boast||."

It appears evident to me, that, the gracious immutable counsels of God*, Father, Son, and Spirit, relative to the salvation of sinners, could have no other source, than divine love and mercy; "being predestinated" to salvation according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, "to the praise of the glory of his grace†." According to the ideas I entertain of the divine counsels, the Father stipulated with the Son‡, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the redemption of his people, which redemption is, in time, thro' the different ages of the church apply'd to them, by the sacred Spirit; so that "God saves us, and calls us, with an holy calling, not according to our works, but, according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us, in Christ Jesus, before the world began, and is now made manifest, by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ§."

These counsels of God could not possibly be executed, or manifested, till after the creation and apostacy of man, but they have now been made known to us more fully by Christ, and, his apostles, as they were also more darkly, by prophets, and "holy men of God," who "spake" and wrote, "as they were mov'd by the Holy Ghost||." By these records of unerring truth, I am assur'd, that, man was originally created in the divine image, but, that, disobeying a positive precept of his Creator and Lord, by eating the

|| Ephes. ii. 8, 9.

* Isaiah xli. 10.

† Ephes. i. 4, 5

§, 11. I Titus i. 2. § 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. || 2 Pet. i. 21.

forbidden fruit, he entail'd misery on himself, and all his posterity*," for (says an inspir'd pen-man) "by that one offence, judgement came upon all men, to condemnation†."

Having set forth the first apostacy, as the spring of all natural and moral evil, I have not fail'd to shew, that, "in the fulness of time, God" (according to his purpose and grace) "sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that" those who believe in him "might receive the adoption of sons‡." I believe, that, our Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate, and having taken on him our nature, obey'd the law which we had broken, fulfill'd it's strictest precepts, and became a sacrifice for sin, dying "the just for the unjust, to bring them to God;" to "redeem them from all iniquity, and purify to himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works§."

Our Saviour, having "humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross||," I am persuaded, his mission was confirm'd, and, the Father's approbation and acceptance of him, in his work, publicly manifested, by his resurrection from the dead**, and that, being ascended up into heaven, he is now "highly exalted at the Father's right hand, where he hath a name given him above every name††. Our Saviour in his exalted state "having receiv'd of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost‡‡," I believe, that the spirit was first shed forth upon his apostles, shewing them

* Gen. i. 27. & ii. 17. † Rom. v. 18. ‡ Gal. iv. 4, 5. § Matth. v. 17. Rom. v. 19. ¶ Peter iii. 18. Titus ii. 14. || Phil. ii. 8. ** Acts ii. 32. †† Phil. ii. 8, 9. ‡‡ Acts ii. 33.

the things of the Father, and of Christ §§; and, that, by the continuance of the same divine and gracious influences to his ministers and people in all succeeding ages, wonderful effects are produc'd on the souls of men, in their conversion, edification, and comfort, and our glorious Redeemer "sees the travail of his soul, and is satisfied**." Christ, thus honour'd and exalted as our High-Priest and Mediator, by the instrumentality of a preached gospel, "makes his people willing in the day of his power," and through the efficacious operation of his spirit, "brings into captivity every thought to" true "obedience," agreeable to the divine plan of operation: Sinners being "chosen to salvation" "through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief" "of the truth††." And as I have shewn the necessity of the spirit's influence in conversion, edification, and consolation, I have also set forth Christ's righteousness, which consists of his obedience, sufferings and death, as the ground of our justification in God's sight, receiv'd by faith, which "is the gift of God." * All who are thus "justified, freely" "by the grace of God, thro' the redemption that" "is in Jesus Christ," are, I have taught, "renew'd" "in the spirit of their minds," "created in Christ" "Jesus, unto good works," have the spirit of Christ in them, and the image of Christ instamp'd upon them †. And, I have not been wanting, in holding forth to believers, the encouragements of the gospel, to a perseverance in well doing, by exhibiting their happiness and security in Christ, their head of life and influence, they being united

§† John, xvi. 14, 15. ** Isaiah, liii. 11, †† Rom. i. 16, Psalm cx. 3. John, xvi. 18. 2 Cor. x. 5. 2 Thes. ii. 13.

* Rom. iii. 22, 5, 18. 1 Peter, i. 19. Ephes. ii. 1.

† Ephes. iv. 23, & ii. 10. Rom. viii 9,

to him by faith, and receiving all supplies of grace from him, being assur'd of this, " that, where
 " God has begun a good work, he will perform it;
 " until the day of Jesus Christ †." " I am
 " persuaded, that, neither death, nor life, nor
 " angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor
 " things present, nor things to come, nor height,
 " nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be
 " able to separate us, from the love of God, which
 " is in Christ Jesus our Lord †." And, as no-
 thing that is unholy can enter the kingdom of
 heaven, I have, in the further course of my mini-
 stry, insisted on sanctification, as a necessary branch
 of our salvation; firmly believing, that " without
 " personal holiness no man shall see the Lord *."
 I trust, that, the directory given by the apostle
 Paul to Titus, has not been neglected, and never
 will be forgotten, by me; " this is a faithful saying,
 " and, these things, I will, that thou affirm constant-
 " ly, that, they which have believ'd in God, might
 " be careful to maintain good works†." And, now,
 I might call on all, that have stately attended my
 ministry here, to witness, that, these distinguish-
 ing leading articles of the glorious gospel of the
 blessed God, have been the subject matter of my
 publick labours, and by the foregoing brief decla-
 ration, all present may judge of my religious senti-
 ments, for themselves. Having neither omitted,
 " to warn the wicked, from his way§," or, to animate
 the people of God, by setting forth the joys of
 eternal life, " to those that love him, are the called
 " according to his purpose,** and " who, by pa-
 " tient continuance in well doing, are seeking for

† Phil. i. 6.

Heb. xii. 14.

** Rom. viii. 28.

‡ Rom. viii. 38. 39.

† Titus iii. 8.

* 1 Thes. iv. 3.

§ Ezek. xxxiii. 3.

“glory, and honour, and immortality*,” I may, with religious boldness, address this audience, in the language of the great Apostle, “Wherefore, I take you to record, this day, that, I am pure from the blood of all men.†”

As to the constitution and order of a church of Christ, I am in sentiment and practice, as well as profession, of that denomination, which is usually call'd congregational or independent.

Having, I trust, faithfully, according to my knowledge, imparted the Gospel of God, and labour'd in the word and doctrine here, for upwards of eight months, “seeking not their's, but them‡,” this Church of Christ, on the 24th of September last, requested my immediate settlement; in consequence of which, we are now met together, in God's house of prayer. And now, let me request my much respected brethren in the ministry, the messengers of the churches who are come to behold our “faith and order||,” and all others now present, to unite in the most fervent prayers, at the throne of grace, that, a divine blessing may accompany the solemnities of this day. In these our addresses to God, may “the spirit of grace and supplication§” possess our hearts, and govern our thoughts; in our praises of God, may our affections be warm'd and elevated; and in hearing the good word of his grace, may we “so hear” as that “our souls may live**.”

As a close, I would, with the greatest humility, acknowledge, that, a sense of my own insufficiency for the due discharge of the important duties devolv'd on me, by my acceptance of the pastoral office among this people, obliges me again, to en-

* Rom. ii. 7. † Acts xx. 26. 27. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 14. Col. ii. 5. § Zech. xii. 10. ** Isaiah lv. 3.

Treat this church and congregation, to "strive together in their prayers to God for me*," that, I may, thro' grace, be strengthen'd more than ever, for the work, be kept "faithful unto death," and, then receive that "crown of life†," which is promis'd to all God's faithful servants, and which will certainly be given to them, by the great "shepherd and bishop of souls,"‡ the Lord Jesus Christ, in the glorious day of his appearing: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

And, now, Sir, permit me to close, with briefly expressing, my sincere, my affectionate, and my best wishes, for you, and the interest of Christ in this place. May you, my dear sir, "obtain mercy " of the Lord, to be faithful,"§ and diligent, in the new sphere of sacred service, on which you are entering! may you be blest'd with much of your master's gracious presence and divine aid, both in your private studies, and publick ministrations! and, may your labours, from time to time, be attended with the greatest success! Under your pastoral care, may the Church here, be "edified, " and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the "comfort of the Holy Ghost, be multiplied**!" "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, " from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus "Christ|||." "May they be perfect, be of one " mind, live in peace, and may the God of love "and peace be with them††! And, when the "chief shepherd shall appear," may you, Sir, may I, may all the pastors of the churches present, with our respective flocks, "be found of

* Rom. xv. 30.

† Rev. ii. 10.

‡ 1 Pet. ii. 25.

§ 1 Cor. vii. 25.

** Acts ix. 31.

||| Eph. vi. 23.

†† 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

him

"him in peace*!" give up an account of ourselves,
and of them, with joy! and, "receive a crown
of glory, that "fadeth not away†." Amen,
and Amen!

* 2 Pet. iii. 14,

† 1 Pet. v. 4.



The

The S E R M O N

B Y

THOMAS TOWLE, B. D.

PHILIPPIANS ii, 16.

*Holding forth the word of life, that, I may rejoice,
in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in
vain, neither labour'd in vain.*

THESE words were originally directed to the church of Christ at Philippi; a once famous city, in that celebrated province of ancient Greece, Macedonia. So the inscription, of this epistle informs us, " Paul, and Timotheus, the " servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints, in " Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the " bishops, and deacons*." But, tho', the passage I have read, was first address'd to the christian society just mention'd, it was certainly intended for the use of all the churches of Christ, in every age, to the end of the world. Taken, then, in this extensive view, the text is, without doubt, suited to the important occasion of our present meeting; accordingly, 'tis in this view, that,

* Ch. i. 1.

I shall

I shall now consider it. May God so attend what shall be suggested from it, with his blessing, as that, this discourse may be of real and great use, to the whole of this assembly, especially, to those, who are more immediately concern'd in the solemn transactions of this day!—The text is a part of a truly comprehensive and noble exhortation, that, therefore, you may see, how it is introduc'd, I shall take the liberty to read the whole exhortation to you: “Do all things,” (says the apostle) “without murmurings, and disputings, that, ye may be blameless, and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine,” or, (as I think, 'tis better render'd in the margin of your bibles) “shine ye, as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life, that, I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in vain, neither labour'd in vain†.” The whole of this advice is so peculiarly excellent, and engaging, that, it would give me great pleasure, minutely to consider every article of it's valuable contents, but, as this would lead me, far beyond the limits allotted me, in the present service, I shall intirely wave such enlargement, and, at once proceed to a distinct consideration of the text itself.

In discoursing on the passage, I shall observe the following method,

Ist. Consider what is here to be understood by “the word of life.”

IIdly. Represent, what should be the disposition and behaviour of a church of Christ, with respect to this; “they are to hold it forth.” And, then,

† Ver. 14, 15, 16.

IIIdly. And

IIIIdly, and lastly. Set before you, the very proper and cogent argument, by which the apostle enforces this duty, as it is express'd in the last clause of the words, "that, I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in vain, neither labour'd in vain."

Ist. I shall consider, what is here to be understood by "the word of life." The Lord Jesus Christ himself is sometimes describ'd under this character; for which reason, some have apprehended, that, he was design'd, by this expression, in the passage we are considering: and indeed! were we to take the phrase before us, in this light, it might be done properly, and to advantage; since, it is, without doubt, the duty, and, should be the endeavour of a church of Christ, to hold forth this their divinely glorious saviour and sov'reign, to the view of men. Truly! I will venture thus publicly to affirm, that, if a religious society, which wears the name of a church of Christ, does not, in any way, or in any degree, hold forth that adorable Redeemer and lord, after whom they are call'd, to the view of men, such a community, however respectable in the eyes of the world, does not deserve that honourable title. But, yet, I conceive, that, "the word of life," in the passage we are attending to, means, what is commonly call'd, the word of God, in other words, the holy scriptures. This sacred volume goes under this very character, in the New Testament; 'tis certainly incumbent on a church of Christ, to hold forth this; and in holding forth "the word of life," in this sense, such a society holds it forth, also, in that other sense of this expression, which has just been mention'd; it being impossible, utterly impossible, that, the divine word, which

is call'd "the word of Christ†," because it holds up Christ to the view of men, should be held forth, and, yet he not be held forth in it. Sometimes the holy scripture is call'd "the word §," and, that, with the utmost justice, because, as men communicate their ideas, to each other, by the expressions of their lips, God has, in that blessed book, convey'd his will to the children of men, by the use of words likewise. But, is the volume I am speaking of, call'd "the word," there is often some addition made to this term, to give duly honourable thoughts concerning it: Thus, in the passage before us, it is denominated, "the word of life." By "life" here, we are, I apprehend, to understand, that peculiarly excellent, that spiritual and divine life, which is the dignity, privilege, and happiness of all true believers, and, of them only. Fallen men are, as sinners, certainly "dead in trespasses and sins." That this, deplorable as it is, is their character, is asserted in scripture,; plain from observation; and, confirm'd by experience. But, thro' the sovereign, and efficacious grace of God, some, among them, are made alive; "you" (says the Apostle Paul to the converted Ephesians, and, the same, may as justly be said, to all who have past under that great change which they had experienc'd,) "you hath God quicken'd "who were dead in trespasses and sins."|| Not indeed every nominal, but, every real Christian, therefore, may say with the same Apostle, "I live."* Now, with the greatest propriety, considering "life" in this peculiarly excellent and most valuable sense, may it be affirm'd, that, the incomparable book of which I am speaking, is "the word of "life." The word of God is the grand mean, un-

† Coloss. iii. 16.

§ James i. 22.

|| Ephes. ii. 1.

* Galat. ii. 20.

der the direction, and by the blessing of the divine Spirit, of beginning, carrying on, and compleating this life, in every one who is so happy as to become the subject of it. For which reason, we are commanded to "receive, with meekness, the ingrafted word," from this very consideration, that, "it is able to save our souls," i. e. under the agency of the Holy Ghost, to begin, and, carry on, the spiritual life, till, it issues, in all the glories of life eternal*.

Thus, I have consider'd, what is here to be understood by "the word of life," and, this was the first thing, I propos'd from the passage. Now,

Ildly, I shall represent, what should be the disposition, and behaviour, of a church of Christ, with respect to this, they are to "hold it forth;" "holding forth," (says the apostle, addressing such a church) "the word of life." And, without doubt, this expression intimates, that, a church of Christ has receiv'd this word. It is, surely, every one must be sensible, impossible, for any to hold forth that, which they have not in their possession, the very mention, therefore, of a church of Christ's "holding forth" "the word of life," even, at first sight, implies, that, such a society has receiv'd it. And, truly, this is the happiness of every society which deserves to bear this honourable character. Such a community is favour'd with the external dispensation of this word, and, if the members of it are, what by their profession they certainly should be, "they have receiv'd it," (to use the apostle Paul's nervous expression) "not as the word of men, but" (as it is in truth) "the word of God †," with real assent, cordial approbation, firm dependence, and,

* James i. 20.

† 1. Thess. ii. 13.

sincere obedience. On this account, we find, the churches of Christ address'd under such characters, and, in such language, thro' the whole New Testament, as plainly intimates, that, if the persons who compose them, were such, as their profession bespoke them, "the Gospel" (to use another expression, of the same apostle I just mention'd) "had come to them, not, in word only, but, also in power, and, in the Holy Ghost, and, in much assurance, so that" (as it follows) "they had turn'd to God, from idols," had made him the supreme object of their affectionate regards, whatever engag'd their main esteem and pursuit before, "to serve the living and true God, and, to wait for his Son from Heaven, even Jesus who delivers from the wrath to come *." Thus (as I have already told you) the epistle where the text is, was directed to the Philippian church, under the character of "the saints at Philippi, which are in Christ Jesus †." But, does a christian church's "holding forth the word of life," intimate, that, a church of Christ has receiv'd this word, it further implies, that, it should be the desire, and endeavour, of such a society, to retain it. Without doubt, every one must own, that, what is not retain'd, even, tho' it has been once receiv'd, cannot be held forth; when, therefore, the churches of Christ are order'd, to "hold forth the word of life," this, even at first view, implies, that, such societies should retain it. Accordingly, some have thought, that, the word in the original, which our version renders "holding forth ‡," should have been translated "holding fast," but, however this be, even the most cursory reader must acknowledge, that, the

* 1. Thess. i. 5, 9, 10.

† Chap. i. 1.

‡ *ἐπιμαρτυροῦντες*.
latter

latter is implied, in the former. Every church of Christ should be greatly concern'd, that, the letter of the word may remain with them, notwithstanding all the endeavours of their most malicious subtle and powerful enemies to deprive them of it. But, should this only be the object of their concern? certainly no: they should be equally solicitous, that this word may continue with them in it's efficacy, and, influence, on their hearts and lives, yea, that, it's energy on both, may be constantly prevalent, and, increasing. Indeed, such a society, as I now speak of must expect to meet with many difficulties, in the conscientious steady performance of the duty I am recommending, but, nevertheless, they must desire, and, endeavour, to persevere in it's discharge, amidst every allurement, and, every terror, with an unshaken firmness. This duty is often enjoin'd on the churches of Christ, "Hold" (says our Blessed Saviour himself, in words, which tho' indeed they were directed to the angel or pastor of the church at Philadelphia, were design'd to be communicated by him, to that sacred society over which he presided, and, which, therefore, may justly be consider'd as address'd to the church itself) "hold that fast which thou hast," meaning "the word of his patience," which he had just mention'd, "that, no one take thy crown:" that, no created Being, either in earth or hell, may deprive thee of that true honour, which an undaunted adherence to my word, even to the end, will reflect upon thee†. Many are the weighty considerations, by which the duty I am speaking of, is enforc'd on churches. Numerous are the evils denounc'd against those christian societies, which are even indifferent and

† Rev. iii. 10, 11.

careless in this respect. The church at Sardis (for instance) had been chargeable with a negligent disposition and behaviour, as to revealed truth and holiness, and, with what an awful severity did the Lord Jesus Christ address her! "Remember" (says he) "how thou hast receiv'd, and heard, and hold "fast, and repent; if, therefore, thou shalt not "watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou "shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." I will visit thee with some tremendous discovery of my resentment, the terror of which shall be greatly heightened, by the peculiarly sudden and unexpected way, in which it shall seize thee ||. But, are there many evils denounc'd, against those churches which do not hold fast the word of life, no less numerous are the blessings promis'd to such as faithfully wish and zealously strive, constantly to retain it. Thus, to the just mention'd church at Sardis, the Lord Jesus Christ said, in language, a part of which has been already quoted, "because "thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also "will keep thee, from the hour of temptation, "which shall come upon all the world, to try "them, that dwell upon the earth §." And have these threatnings, and these promises been given in vain? Certainly not: Various have been the instances of their accomplishment. The church at Sardis is long ago dissolv'd, yea, the once famous city where it was, is now become a contemptible village; while, on the other hand, as long as that church maintain'd the faith and holiness of the gospel in their simplicity, not only the place where it stood, was in a flourishing condition, but, the church itself, truly respectable. But, does the expression I am considering, "holding forth the

"word of life", intimate, that, a church of Christ has receiv'd this word, and, that, such a society should retain it, it further means, and, indeed, this is the chief idea intended by the expression, that, it is the duty of such a community, to exhibit it, to hold up and display it's incomparably excellent and precious contents, to the view of men. The contents of the divine Revelation are admirably calculated, to glorify God, and, to promote the noblest interest of mankind, even, in their present unhappy fallen circumstances. Having this grand tendency, it is the will of God, that, what he has reveal'd, may be held up and display'd, in our world, that, so his word may become instrumental, in his own hand, for advancing his glory, and, producing the truest happiness to sinful men. In pursuance of this truly great and benevolent design, among other wise and gracious ends with which gospel churches were instituted and are continu'd, this is one, and a very important one it is, that, in them, there might be a constant exhibition of those great things which it has pleas'd God to make known in his word. Hence, we find the churches of Christ describ'd in scripture, by such expressions, as naturally lead to the conclusion, that, this was one main end of their appointment, erection, and continuance, to this moment. A church of Christ, (for instance) is call'd "the pillar and ground" (or, as in the margin of the Bible "stay") "of the truth. These things" (says the apostle Paul to Timothy) "write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee, shortly, but, if, I tarry long, that, thou may'st know, how, thou oughtest to behave thyself, in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of

“ of the truth *.” Now, what is the meaning of this representation? Not, that, divine truth is to be receiv’d on the authority of any church whatever, no, not, even, of that very society, which has the assurance to call themselves, the infallible church: But, that, a church of Christ is design’d to hold up, and, hold forth, revealed truth, to the view of men, just as a pillar, in some public place, holds up, and holds forth, an edict affix’d to it, on purpose, that, such edict may be preserv’d, and, made known, thereby. So, in the verse immediately before the text, the church of Christ at Philippi, is represented, as a light in the world, “ye” (says the Apostle, addressing the Philippian Christians, not merely as distinct believers, but as a church of Christ,) “ye shine,” or, “shine ye, as lights in the world, †” in other words, ye do, or, ye ought, to be the means of conveying light to others. This expression is, at first sight, figurative, and, there are different opinions, among interpreters, as to what is alluded to in it, but, whatever that be, the intimation is plain, that, such churches are design’d to communicate light. If the allusion be (as some think) to a candlestick, the use of that well known utensil, is, you are sensible, to convey light, for the several purposes for which light is wanted; agreeable to our blessed Lord’s express declaration, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, cover-
“eth it, with a vessel, or, putteth it under a bed,
“but setteth it on a candlestick, that, they which
“enter in, may see the light ‡.” If there be a reference to a light house (as others apprehend) all who have any acquaintance with those structures, are sensible, that, the design of them, is, to give light, to the mariner, while under the

* I. Tim. iii. 15.

† Ver. 15.

‡ Luke viii. 16.

veil of night, continuing his voyage over the pathless ocean, that, he may see, how to keep his vessel clear of those rocks and sands, by which he is in danger. Or, should the metaphor before us, be taken from the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon, and stars, (as is the sentiment of others) all acknowledge, that, one principal design of those bodies, is (according to their great Creator's express declaration) "to give light upon the earth *." In whatever point of view, then, we take the expression, "lights in the world," it manifestly implies, that, a church of Christ should, and, when it acts in character, in some degree, does, convey light to men; which is said in the text to be, by "holding forth the word of life." All that I shall further do, then, under this head, will be, to shew you, how a church of Christ should, as a "light in the world, hold forth this word." Here I would just premise, that, a church of Christ may be said, to "hold forth the word of life" to men, when it displays the various particulars, both of truth, and duty, which it hath pleas'd God, that infinitely great, and gracious being, who indited the scriptures, to make known therein. Taking the expression, then, in this sense, a church of Christ should "hold forth the word of life," three ways, by the purity of it's doctrine; the strictness of it's discipline; and, an exemplary holiness, in the personal deportment of all it's members.

(1). A church of Christ should "hold forth the word of life," by the purity of it's doctrine. It should exert itself, that such a ministry may be fix'd, continu'd, and encourag'd, in it, as will faithfully display the glorious contents of that word. The

* Gen. i. 15.

right of choosing, and, supporting their own pastors, is one, and a glorious one too, among the many noble privileges, with which the churches of Christ are dignified. That, this right may be properly exercis'd, the qualifications of a christian bishop, of one who is duly qualified to be a christian pastor, are clearly, and, often delineated in the new testament. It should, therefore, be the desire, and, endeavour of christian churches, to choose, continue, and, encourage those as their pastors, who appear, in some good degree, possess'd of those qualifications. Among the particulars necessary to form the character of a christian bishop, this is one, and, a comprehensive and important one, indeed, it is, that he "be apt to teach,"† accordingly, every church of Christ should wish, and, strive, that, such a pastor may be settled with them, as, in the genuine sense of this expression, is "apt to teach," not ignorantly, or, confidently, forward, but really, and properly fitted, to be a teacher of others. Here, I might give you a large explication of this expressive phrase, but, as this would employ too much of your time, I shall only suggest an hint or two, on this important subject. Would a church of Christ choose and encourage one as their pastor, who is "apt to teach," duly qualified to be a teacher of others, the object of their choice, and, encouragement, must be (to use an expression of the Apostle Paul) "sound in the faith†," a man who has a just acquaintance with, and, is a real believer of the truth himself, yea, who possesses some considerable degree of these noble blessings. For any set of men to introduce, and countenance, one under the character of a christian Pastor, who is

† 1 Tim. iii. 2.

† Titus i. 13

wholly,

wholly, or, in great measure, unacquainted with those great things, as to which he is appointed, to instruct them, or, who does not really and firmly believe their truth and importance, is a gross absurdity. Again, would a christian church settle and, support, as a pastor among them, one who is "apt to teach," duly qualified to be a teacher of others, he, whom it selects to, and, supports in, this office, must have ability, and, inclination, to communicate what he knows and believes. He must have ability to do this, be capable of forming ideas, and, clothing them, in such words, as neither to be unintelligible, nor, justly contemptible. And, he must have an inclination to this, also, be willing to dispense the sacred articles of divine revelation, which he knows and believes, when ever an opportunity, for doing it, offers. For any society, which calls itself, or, is call'd by others, a church of Christ, to elect, and encourage, a person, as their pastor, who, whatever be his pretensions to soundness in the faith, has not inclination, or, if inclination, not ability, to appear, as the instructor of others, is more than unreasonable, 'tis preposterous. But, to what has been said, on the subject before us, I must add one thing more, and, that is, that, if a church of Christ would settle, and, maintain, as their pastor, One who is "apt to teach," has this necessary qualification for a christian bishop, the person set apart for this purpose, must be a man, who, they have reason to think, will recommend and enforce the doctrine he delivers, by the insinuating charms of a good example. For any body of men, who stile themselves, or, are stil'd by others, a church of Christ, to bring in, and, support a person, as an administrator of the divine word and ordinances among them, who makes no

F

conscience

conscience of behaving agreeably to the doctrine he preaches, what is it? But, to set up one, who, while he, " holds forth the word of life," in the declarations of his lips, holds out a direct and shameful contradiction to it, in the general strain and course of his life. Thus, you see, the first way, in which a church of Christ should " hold forth the word of life," by the purity of it's doctrine, by exerting itself, that, such a ministry may be fix'd, continu'd, and, encourag'd, in it, as will constantly display the glorious contents of that word. Again,

(2) A church of Christ should " hold forth the word of life," by the strictness of it's discipline. Like every regular society, a christian church has it's government, a sacred jurisdiction, within itself, which it has a right to exercise, for it's own preservation, welfare, and, happiness; and, 'tis this, which I call the discipline of a church of Christ. By the strictness of this, then, every such community, should " hold forth the word of life." It's whole discipline should be so conducted, as that, the glorious contents of the divine word may be display'd thereby; that, all who " behold," not only " it's faith," but (that, I may use an apostolic expression) " it's order *," may see, that, it has not merely a sincere and genuine, but also, a strong and fervent affection for that word. I have already told you, that, every church of Christ, has a sacred jurisdiction, within itself, which it has a right to exercise, for it's own preservation, welfare, and, happiness; but, then, let it be constantly remember'd, that, this jurisdiction was settled in his churches, by Christ himself, and,

*Coloss. iii. 5.

that,

that, the exercise of it, is to be perpetually regulated according to his revealed will. A christian church has no authority to make laws, but, what is requir'd of such a society, is, to govern itself, by laws already made, even, by the laws of that infinitely glorious and gracious Redeemer, who is King in Zion †. It is, therefore, incumbent on every community of this kind, continually to hold forth the word of Christ, as the only warrant, on which it acts in all it's proceedings; shewing, that, not it's own will, that, not the will of any man, or set of men, (however eminent, for piety, learning, or usefulness) but, the will of Christ, as made known in his word, is the directory of it's whole conduct. And, should a church of Christ avow, that it has no other authority, by which it conducts it's sacred discipline, but, the divine word, it should hold forth that word, by setting out to view, it's principles, and precepts, in a regular and resolute attendance to that discipline. Indeed, if the society I am speaking of, " holds forth the word of life," with the greatest clearness, in the purity of it's doctrine, but, neglects this with respect to discipline, is wholly, or, in great measure, unconcern'd about any discipline, or, conducts what discipline it has, in such a manner, as that, the doctrines, and duties of God's holy word, are not, at all, or but darkly, held out to view, thereby; such a church acts a strangely inconsistent, yea, dishonourable, and dangerous part, a part dishonourable to it's Lord, dangerous to itself. Would a church of Christ, uniformly " hold forth the word of life," it must exhibit the beauties of that word, not merely, by a soundness in it's ministry, but, by a strictness in

the management of it's discipline also. The discipline of a church of Christ may be consider'd in three lights, with reference to the admission of those who are propos'd to it's communion; it's conduct towards them while of their body; or, it's censuring, and, even excluding, such, as appear unfit to continue among them; accordingly, in each of these views, a church of Christ should, by the strictness of it's discipline, "hold forth the word of life." Such a society, should (I say) "hold forth the word of life," in that part of it's discipline, which concerns the admission of those who are propos'd to it's communion. Among other powers, given by Christ to his churches, this is one, and a peculiarly valuable one it is, a right of admission to the various priviledges enjoy'd in them; in the exercise, therefore of this right, they should "hold forth the word of life," receiving those, and, those only, into their sacred inclosure, who, as far as they can judge, cordially believe the truths made known, and conscientiously endeavour to practise the duties commanded, in the word. Again, the society I speak of, should "hold forth the word of life," in that part of it's discipline, which concerns it's conduct towards those who are of it's body. Among the numerous duties enjoin'd by Christ, upon his churches, this is one, the maintaining a continual watch over the temper, conversation, and, behaviour of their respective members; accordingly, each of these churches should perform this duty, in such a manner, as to "hold forth the word of life," thereby; continually shewing, that, what they are mainly sollicitous about, is, that, the faith and holiness of the gospel may be display'd, in their commanding influence, and incomparable beauty, among them, that the view with

with which they "look diligently" (as the author of the epistle to the Hebrews expresses it) is "lest any root of bitterness, springing up, trouble them, and thereby many be defiled*." Finally, as to this, a christian society should "hold forth the word of life," in that branch of it's discipline, which regards the censuring, or, even excluding such, as appear unfit to continue any longer among them. A power of censuring, and even excluding unworthy members, is given, by the Lord Jesus Christ, to his churches. This power they are commanded to exercise, whenever necessary. "Now" (says the Apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica) "we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves, from every brother that walketh disorderly, and, not after the tradition, which he receiv'd of us"† The primitive churches did exercise this power: an awful instance of which we have, in the behaviour of the church at Corinth, towards the incestuous person‡. Yea, the churches of Christ are commended, when, this power was us'd by them, in a proper manner. "I know," (says our Lord Jesus Christ himself, to the church at Ephesus) i. e. I approve "thy works, and, thy labour, and, thy patience, and, how thou canst not bear them which are evil§." Accordingly, a church of Christ should exercise this part of it's discipline, as well as those which have been already mention'd, so as that, the word of life may be held forth thereby. A society of this kind, should admonish, and, if it's admonitions are unavailing, exclude, those who plainly appear,

* Heb. xii, 15.

† 1. Thess. iii, 6.

‡ 1 Corinth. v.

§ Revel. ii. 2.

after due enquiries into their disposition, conversation, and behaviour, to have cast off a regard to those fundamental doctrines, and essential duties of the divine word, for which they once seem'd to have, not only, a sincere, but, strong affection: a church of Christ should (I say) proceed in this manner, towards all of this character, who may, at any time, be found among them, uninfluenc'd by any worldly considerations whatever. Thus you see the second way in which a church of Christ should "hold forth the word of life," by the strictness of it's discipline. There is one thing more to be mention'd, under this head, and that is,

(3) A church of Christ should "hold forth the word of life," by an exemplary holiness, in the personal deportment of all it's members. Every one, who is favour'd with a place in such a community, should wish, and strive, to display the glories of the word of God, in his own conduct. By his unshaken adherence to the truths reveal'd, and, zealous performance of the duties enjoin'd, in that word, he should set forth, and recommend it, to all around him; so showing, that, he earnestly desires, and, conscientiously labours to approve himself, perpetually observant of that admirable precept, which, though originally address'd, by our blessed Lord, to his first disciples, was intended to be regarded by all of the same character, in future times: "let your light so shine before men, that, they may see your good works, and glorify your father who is in heaven*." And indeed! if any society which goes under the name of a church of Christ, maintains the exactest orthodoxy, yea, professes

to keep up the strictest discipline, and, yet, the greatest part of it's members are negligent, in observing the important duties of religion, and morality, such a community cannot, with propriety, be said, to "hold forth the word of life", to the world; instead of giving the world, such a view of this word, as may lead them to form just and exalted sentiments of it, they give them such a misrepresentation of that blessed book, as has a direct tendency to fill them with improper and dishonourable thoughts, concerning it. Accordingly, I will venture, on this occasion, to declare, that, in my opinion, the careless and licentious lives of men, under a profession of religion, and, even of some who thought themselves, and were thought by others, leaders in the religious societies to which they belong'd, have contributed more, towards producing a neglect and contempt of the scriptures, among men, than all the objections, even, of the most subtle, determin'd, and; inveterate infidels themselves. Thus I have represented, as briefly as the nature of the subject would admit, what should be the disposition, and, behaviour of a church of Christ, with respect to the word of life; "holding forth" (says the apostle, in the text, addressing such a church) "the word of life." And, this was the second thing, I told you, I should do from the words. Having gone thro' this, then,

Thirdly and lastly, I shall set before you; the very proper and cogent argument, by which the apostle enforces this duty, as it is express'd in the last clause of the words; "that, I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in vain, neither, labour'd in vain." Many are the arguments, by which this duty might be recommended, some of which are suggested in the foregoing

foregoing verse, and, in the text itself; but, as "time would fail me," was I to enter on them, I shall confine myself, to that consideration, which is presented to view, in this last part of the passage, "that" (says the apostle) "I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in vain, neither, labour'd in vain." Before I attend to the particular discussion of this important consideration, I shall just mention this one thing, that, it will be consider'd by me, not with a view to the apostle only, by whom it was wrote, but, as applicable to every other minister of Christ, to whom it may, with great propriety, be refer'd also. The first thing observable in that part of the text, we are now considering, is a noble representation of a gospel minister's conduct, in the discharge of his sacred work. In Greece, where the Christians, to whom the epistle before us was directed, liv'd, running, wrestling, with other exercises, of the like robust and manly kind, were perform'd in public, to entertain the spectators. To these games (as those exercises, were commonly call'd) there are frequent allusions in this epistle to the Philippians, and to these there is certainly a reference in the passage we are considering. The expression, "run" manifestly leads our thoughts to the racers, and, the word, "labour'd," may, as properly, be applied to all the other particulars of those diversions. Now, with great reason, may faithful ministers be compar'd to the performers in those games, if we consider an end as aim'd at by both. The racer, (for instance) aim'd at reaching the goal, that so he might receive the reward appointed to the person who was so successful as to arrive at it, and, thus a faithful minister of the gospel aims, I mean, as a minister aims,

aims, at the attainment of an end too; and, a noble end indeed! it is, not, the securing any secular advantages, or, emoluments to himself, but, the advancement of the divine glory, and, promoting the noblest interests of immortal souls. And, may faithful ministers justly be compar'd to the persons who engag'd in the sports alluded to, if we consider an end as aim'd at by both, a resemblance will appear between them, likewise, if we think on the labour, gone thro' by both, for attaining their ends. The racer (that I may instance in him again) exerted every limb, with the greatest vehemence, and, strain'd every nerve, with the utmost earnestness, while "he press'd "towards the mark *," in like manner, the faithful zealous minister of the gospel, puts forth every power, both of body and mind, in order to his accomplishment of the more important end aim'd at by him. I am sensible indeed! many think, a minister's work very easy, that, it is a kind of genteel employment, which requires no great skill or pains, to discharge it; and, perhaps, there have been some, under the name of ministers, who have, by their behaviour in the ministry, given too great occasion, for such an opinion; but, nevertheless, it is a certain, and unquestionable truth, that, "if any man desires the office of a "bishop," as "he desires a good †," an honourable, and useful, so he desires a great, a laborious, and difficult employment. Such is the labour of this work, that, was it not for the aids of seasonable grace at present, and, the delightful prospect of future everlasting glory, not

* Philip. iii. 14.

† 1 Tim. iii. 1.

a man upon earth, however extensive his natural abilities, or, however eminent his acquir'd furniture, could be equal to it's vast compass of important duties. But, does the part of the text now before us, include a representation of a gospel minister's conduct in his office, it further intimates, when such an one's labour is really successful, that, he may be said "not " to have run in vain, nor labour'd in vain," when, those among whom his ministry is discharg'd, "hold forth the word of life." Then might the racer (that, I may illustrate this by him likewise) be consider'd as unsuccessful, when, tho' he exerted his strength, and, spent his spirits, in stretching towards the goal, he did not reach it; in like manner, may a minister of the gospel be call'd unsuccessful too, when, tho', he puts himself out, to the very utmost, in the discharge of his ministry, those among whom he performs it, are not made holy, in heart and life, thereby : On the contrary, then might the racer be counted successful, when, he arriv'd at the goal; and just so may a gospel minister be esteem'd successful, when, by the blessing of God on his ministrations, those to whom he ministers, are converted; make a public profession of the name of Christ, in his churches; and, walk becoming the solemn engagements they take on themselves. But, more than this, the clause of the text we are now considering, implies, that, the success of a gospel minister's labours will give every one of this character, real and great joy, at the day of Christ. By "the day of Christ," in this passage, we are certainly to understand, that important period which is drawing on apace, "when the Lord Jesus shall be reveal'd, from Heaven †,"

“Heaven†,” under the august and universally interesting character, of final judge. At that time, the event of every gospel minister’s labours will be apparent: at present, ’tis not easy to determine concerning it, but, at that “day of revelation‡,” it will be manifest indeed. Accordingly, then, the success, with which the labours of every faithful dispenser of God’s word have been attended, will become visible. And will a gospel minister’s success be manifest at that day? The view of it then, will give every one, who has a just claim to this character, a sincere and lively joy, a joy not to be express’d, or conceiv’d, at present. The word render’d “rejoice” in the text*, means, joy to a very great and considerable degree, joy attended, not merely with pleasure and chearfulness, but, with exultation and triumph too. Indeed! a view of the success of his labours gives a faithful minister joy in this world, a joy, to which that arising from his possessing the greatest and brightest worldly advantages, is not comparable; and, if so, what an extasy of delight, will one of this character feel, and express, in that great day, when, the whole of his success will stand full before him! He will rejoice in it, for various comprehensive, and weighty reasons. One cause of his joy, then, will be, that, the success of his ministry proves honourable to himself, not only as it will then be seen, that, he had been an instrument, in the Redeemer’s hands, of accomplishing the greatest and most gracious purposes, but also, as he will, at that day, be acknowledg’d, by his infinitely glorious master himself, even in

† 2 Thess. i. 7.

‡ Rom. ii. 5.

* καίχημα.

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the presence of that vast multitude of men and angels which shall then be collected, yea, advanc'd by him to the possession of that distinguished happiness, which shall undoubtedly be bestow'd on such; (I say) undoubtedly, for, we are expressly assur'd, that, "they that be wise", (or, as in the margin of your Bibles, they that be "teachers") "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, "and, they that turn many to righteousness, as "the stars for ever and ever*," i. e. (that, I may briefly express the meaning of this glorious and animating promise) all faithful ministers of the gospel shall be for ever adorn'd with a steady glory, and those among them, who have been peculiarly useful, in advancing the kingdom of their divine master, shall as eternally be seen with a more than common degree of brilliancy and lustre. Again, another ground of the delight I am speaking of, will be, that, a successful ministry terminates in the advantage of those towards whom it has been accompany'd with a blessing. Does it give a faithful minister the greatest delight, he feels in this world, to see those who attend his ministrations, give evidence, that, they are real, establish'd, and lively Christians, by their steady adherence to the doctrines and duties of the gospel of Christ, even amidst the imperfections of the present state; what heart can conceive, what tongue can express the rapture, with which he shall behold them, at the right hand of the Judge, in the last day, completely holy, and, just ready to rise, with their exalted Redeemer, to take possession of the promis'd glory. But one thing more must be added, as to the subject be-

* Dan. xii. 3.

fore us, and, that is, that, a gospel minister's joy, on beholding the success of his ministry, at the day of Christ, will chiefly arise from the view he will then have, that, such success advances the divine glory. And truly, the divine glory will appear to be advanc'd indeed! when the success of the gospel ministry is fully manifested, since, then, the electing love of the father, the redeeming grace of the Son, and, the efficacious influence of the holy Spirit, will be display'd, in their respective glories, as lying at the foundation of that success. And, now, surely, what the apostle mentions, in that part of the text which I have just gone over, may well be consider'd in the light in which he places it, as a sufficient reason, why the churches of Christ should, in all the ways which have been insisted on, "hold forth the word of life." Will such a disposition and behaviour, animate the joy of a faithful minister, at the last day, when, to feel a genuine, well grounded delight, will be of the utmost moment, surely, it becomes all, among whom he dispenses the word and ordinances, assiduously to cultivate that temper and conduct, which will be productive of this joy. Not to mention other considerations, from whence this would appear, permit me to say, common gratitude certainly demands it. What! shall a faithful minister of the gospel deny himself those secular advantages, which he has equal reason, with others, to expect, did he make them the objects of his pursuit; shall he exert himself, to the utmost, that, those among whom he labours, may be eternally saved, employ his time, use his talents, consume his strength, and, impair his spirits, with this truly benevolent, and noble view; shall he (I say) do all these things, and, yet, those
with

with regard to whose most important interests, he constantly acts in this engaging manner, be unconcern'd about giving him true joy, here or hereafter ; surely ! the temper and behaviour of such persons in this respect, must, whatever figure they make among others, or how highly soever they think of themselves, be justly chargeable with real meanness, and base ingratitude. Thus I have set before you, the very proper and cogent argument, by which the apostle enforces the duty enjoin'd in the text, as it is express'd in the last clause of the words, "that I may rejoice, in the day of Christ, that, I have not run in vain, neither, labour'd in vain." And so I have attended to the whole I propos'd, from the passage before us; I shall now conclude this discourse, with an hint, or two, which will lead, if God bless it, to a due improvement of what has been said. And,

Ist. How great a blessing are the churches of Christ to our world ! Does not every one acknowledge, that, whatever conveys light, in this part of the creation, is to be valu'd ; and, is this a particular in which all agree ? then certainly, the churches of Christ should be highly esteem'd ; since, by means of them, the noblest, even, spiritual and divine light, is diffus'd among men ; Let us be thankful, that, so many of these sacred inclosures are in the part of the world, where we live, and, tho' some of them may not be at all respectable, on secular accounts, and, accordingly, are overlook'd, and despis'd by the world in general, yea, too much slighted, even by some professors in the present age of prevailing dissipation, let us entertain, and express, a real and ardent affection for them. The infinitely glorious Majesty of heaven and earth, has repeatedly discover'd a peculiar regard for the churches of

of his son, let us all, in this respect, follow his blessed and perfect example. Let us resolutely stand at a distance from every principle and practice, (by whomsoever recommended) which has a natural tendency to extinguish or lessen our esteem for these spiritual communities; and, on the contrary, let us as zealously espouse those sentiments and actions, (how few soever appear on their behalf) which are plainly calculated to continue and heighten our regards for them, by placing them in that truly worthy and respectable light, in which they are plac'd in the word of God. But,

IIIdly. How sad is it, when any societies, which bear the name of christian churches, neglect the duty commanded in the text! It is possible, that, a community, which goes under this honourable character, may be criminal, greatly criminal, in this respect. Such a body may become indifferent, as to purity of doctrine, or strictness of discipline, and, the members of it, may be, many of them at least, careless, if not licentious, in their personal behaviour; yea, such a society, instead of holding forth truth and holiness, may exhibit error and sin, to the world. Now, this, wherever it takes place, is truly lamentable: hereby, the great head of the church is dishonour'd; the persons themselves, who compose such a community, are greatly injur'd; and, much mischief is done among men in general. Whenever, then, so melancholy an object presents itself to us, it should fill us, with sincere and deep concern; a concern to be express'd, on every proper opportunity, by the language of our lips, yea, by correspondent actions in our lives too. And, are these things so? Then,

IIIIdly.

Thirdly, and lastly, How solicitous should ye, my christian friends, who are most interested in the solemn business of this day, be, to perform the duty, on which I have been insisting! Ye, Sirs, who, tho' ye have not places at the sacramental table, stately attend the worship of God here, should consider, that, ye have a concern in what has now been deliver'd. It is incumbent on you, to "hold forth the word of life," by exerting yourselves, on behalf of the regular administration of the divine word and ordinances, in this place. Ye have done generously hitherto, (I mention it thus publicly to your honour) persevere, in the same laudable conduct, with constancy, integrity, and, cheerfulness. If you have any just regard, for your own eternal interest, or that of your families; surely! ye cannot be indifferent, whether, "the word of life," that grand instrument, in the hand of God, for the salvation of men, "be held forth," or not, among you. May God express his approbation, of the encouragement, you have given, or, hereafter shall give, to the administration of his word and institutions here, by making them the means, of spiritual blessings, to you and your's! Ye, my brethren, who are members of the church, that stately meets for worship, within these walls; ye, (I say) should be particularly concern'd, to comply with the command, I have now been insisting on. The church of Christ at Hertford, has, for many years, maintain'd a considerable reputation, among the churches of Christ, for it's stedfast adherence, to the faith, order, and, holiness, of the gospel, take heed, therefore, that, ye continue to support this truly honourable and important character,

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for time to come, constantly remembering, that, the true glory of a church of Christ, consists, not, in the number, or, wealth, of it's members, but, in it's firm attachment to the doctrines, and, duties of the word of God. Especially, let me beseech you, to exemplify, in your practice, what that word enjoins; on all the churches of Christ, towards their pastors, in your behaviour towards him, who has this day publickly taken the pastoral charge among you. Esteem him; speak respectfully of him; carry yourselves becomingly towards him; chearfully contribute to his support; attend his ministry, with care, and, constancy; and, above all, be frequent and fervent in prayer to God for him. And, now, reverend Sir, this day publickly settled among this people, permit me to suggest a few words to you; words which I hope you will consider, not as the dictates of an usurp'd authority, but, as the expression of an affectionate concern, for your's and this church's real welfare. As, those among whom you labour, are to "hold forth the word of life," let it be your care, to be found constant, in the faithful, diligent, and, zealous performance of this duty, likewise. You immediately succeed one, whose honourable character it certainly was, that, he was immoveably stedfast, in the faith and holiness, of the gospel, the truly reverend Mr. John Saunders, it will therefore be peculiarly disgraceful to his immediate successor, should he be unsteady, and, wavering, as to these great things. Abide then, Sir, by every truth which God's word reveals, with intrepid resolution; preside, in the discipline of God's house, with a zeal, directed by knowledge, and, temper'd with meekness; and, be sure to enforce,

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whatever you inculcate, with a good example; that, so those among whom you labour, may not only hear the word of God recommended from your lips, but, behold it urg'd upon them, by the exemplary holiness of your life also. Thus may you hope, by divine grace, to be truly useful, in the present state, and, have increasing evidence, that, thro' the mercy of God, and, the merit of the Redeemer, you shall share, in those peculiar honours, with which, all the faithful ministers of the Lord Jesus, shall certainly be recompens'd, at his second coming.

7 AP 66

E R R A T U M.

Page 30. Line 35. for, *are sensible*, read, *own*.

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